

Australia's Struggle With a Rabbit Plague

FOR the first time in thirty years, Australians begin to hope that the rabbit plague may be exterminated. The men who have fought the anti-rabbit fight at an expense of tens of thousands a year begin to lift their despairing heads. The drought in Australia in 1916, 1917 and 1918 has caused the death by starvation of millions of rabbits and new advances of the pest cannot be found. From all statistics the pest is at last well in hand toward extermination in another dozen years. It is estimated by government experts in New South Wales alone that the rabbit pest has consumed human and domestic animal foodstuffs to the value of more than a billion dollars in thirty years.

However, in hundreds of stations—acres of lands owned as grain fields and sheep and cattle foraging sections—the number of rabbits has been cut down millions or fully one-sixth of the whole. That is a feat which no known campaign of extermination or science of destruction had been able to accomplish.

Since the effects of the drought have come to be realized fully, men who had thought the riddance of Australia of vegetation-destroying hordes of rabbits an impossibility have taken new hope.

The wild rabbit in Australia has brought hundreds of landowners to poverty. The best-posted speakers in the colonial legislative assembly have estimated that the pest has cost Australia as high as 20,000,000 pounds sterling in one year, by the forage it has eaten. In 1896, the rabbit pest consumed, by actual finding, over \$135,000,000 worth of grain and farming and sheep forage in Australia.

Never was a pest more innocently introduced. Several "squatters" (men who own literally square miles of land) from England introduced English rabbits on their estates in Australia in the early seventies. Their purpose was to form hunting preserves. In January, 1873, it was an act of the Australian Parliament that the killing or taking of rabbit was unlawful, and there are numerous instances of hunters punished for taking rabbits on estates belonging to the rich "squatters."

But so wonderfully prolific did the rabbits prove and so well adapted to the country that by 1884, the rabbit pest began to be a formidable problem for Australian agriculture. By 1890 the rabbit was a national scourge, and whole days were spent by Parliament listening to scientists who discussed measures to combat the increasing millions of rabbits.

Rabbit drives have been held without number. Hundreds of men and boys have engaged several days in them, and as many as 600,000 rabbits have been slain as the result. Drives that have resulted in 70,000 slain rabbits have been common.

Sir Edward Harper considered he was worth in lands in New South Wales, near Byrock, several million dollars in 1888. He went into bankruptcy in 1897, and he is one of several wealthy Australians who assert the losses of capital came from devastation caused by hordes of rabbits to his sheep forage lands.

It was found thirty years ago that individual campaigns for rabbit extermination were useless, because while one landowner would fight the plague all the time, another would surrender and his property would become a breeding place of as many animals as his neighbor had slain.

The New South Wales Parliament appropriated \$160,000 in 1896, and kept that up annually twelve years, to pay for united anti-rabbit campaigns. That proved also worthless. Unfortunately, too many runholders are in the hands of banks for loans, and the mortgagor would not give his personal attention to what he considered a hopeless case of bankruptcy by the rabbit scourge. Meanwhile the enemy advanced literally by leaps and bounds.

One district after another became infested; large areas of country were regarded as hardly worth occupying, as the sheep would not thrive on lands once overrun by rabbits.

Experience showed that men could not cope with rabbits on land once overrun. This led to the policy of meeting the evil mainly by exclusion. Owners within proclaimed districts are required to erect fences capable of excluding rabbits, while the government itself has expended large sums in the direction of fences to separate clean from infested districts. Where these have been erected in time and sufficiently guarded afterward they have retarded the advance of the invaders; but it has often happened that the enemy has turned the flank of the position, and with the fence still unfinished, the enemy's van has been found to have passed the line and occupied the country in the rear. Other means were also tried to deal with the evil.

Once Sign Painter, Now Does Royalty



SEYMOUR STONE

IT WAS because when he was a sign painter he was a good sign painter that Seymour M. Stone came to be a painter of royalty and of the great people of Europe and America. His career is a perfect exemplification of the old copy book axiom of the sure reward that comes from doing well the duty that lies nearest one's hand. A collection of his paintings was shown a few weeks ago in the famous Corcoran Gallery of Art, in Washington, and there still are wagons being hauled about the streets of Chicago that bear the faint marks of his brush.

Seymour Stone was born in Chicago, one of five children in a family that knew the pinch of poverty. At the age of ten the boy was forced to shoulder

part of the burden of supporting himself and the other children. He alone of the five manifested artistic ability; and, as the nearest approach to the ambition that was nearest his heart, he got a job as a wagon painter at fifty cents a day. In the meantime he spent his evenings at an art school, working far into the night.

Instead of despising his humble occupation and shirking it, the art student put his heart into it with such good effect that eventually his wages were increased to \$6 a day. He felt that the time had come, however, for him to make a start on his real career, so he gave up his comfortable \$6 a day job and went East. There didn't appear to be much of an opening in the art world for a boy who had been painting wagons, but eventually a Boston newspaper offered him \$10 a week to work in its art department. Gladly he accepted the chance, but that small sum was not enough to pay even his living expenses, and soon his savings were exhausted. Art would have to wait a while longer on necessity. He drifted to New York and then to Philadelphia. Flat broke and hungry, he applied to a sign company for a job and got it.

The task assigned to him was the painting of a condensed milk sign on a dead wall. The pay was only half what he had earned in Chicago, but his conscience would not let him be a slacker. The cows he painted on the side of that building were real cows, and they grazed in a real meadow.

And it is now that the old copy book maxim begins to work. As young Stone swung on his scaffold from day to day a man might have been seen to stop from time to time and scrutinize the growing picture carefully. Finally he called the painter from his lofty perch and asked him how he would like to go to New York and paint drop curtains for a theatrical studio.

Needless to say, Stone went. Five years of close work and study followed. At length a magazine which had before refused his work took one of his paintings. Other magazines quickly followed suit. Prosperous days appeared to be ahead of him.

But he was not yet satisfied that he was ready to settle down for his life work. He wanted to see the galleries of Europe, and with another art student he set out. There were periods of study under various European teachers and enough work to keep the wolf from the door. One day Julius Rosenwald, the Chicago millionaire, saw a portrait he liked in the American consulate in Munich. Inquiry developed that it had been made by a young American named Stone. Mr. Rosenwald climbed the stairs to the attic where Stone and his chum lived and left an order for a portrait of his daughter.

Then, after the sometimes thoughtless manner of millionaires, the Rosenwalds moved on to Lucerne, expecting the artist to follow. The artist did, but he had to borrow his chum's overcoat, having none of his own.

But that was the turning of the tide. The first picture was so satisfactory that Stone engaged to paint each of the other members of the family. After that, big commissions came in rapid succession. Among those who sat for him were the Princess Marie Alexandra Reuss, of Brandenburg, a descendant of Catherine the Great; Princess Wittgenstein, of Bavaria, sister-in-law of the Queen of the Belgians; the Viscount de Faramond and Viscountess de Faramond and their son; Admiral Richelieu and many others.

Now after fifteen years' absence, Seymour Stone returns to his native land with the reputation of being one of the greatest living portrait painters.

Government reward amounting to \$125,000 was offered to any one who would discover a plan by which the plague could be effectually ended. The one suggestion which created the greatest confidence was that of Pasteur. His proposal was to destroy the rabbits by the introduction of the epidemic disease known as chicken cholera among them.

The great reputation of Pasteur induced the government of New South Wales to expend a large sum in testing the alleged discovery. An island fully stocked with rabbits was given up to Pasteur's assistants, two of whom were sent out by him to demonstrate the value of the scheme. For a time great hopes were entertained that the problem was about to be solved, and that to science

invasion has been successful over large districts in the colonies of New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, and to a small extent in Queensland. It is even said of late that rabbits seem to be following Eyre's famous starvation track into the vast colony of Western Australia. A good deal has now been done to check the advance toward the more settled districts of these colonies. Nothing has yet been done to put an end to the rabbit plague itself.

No one shoots them; nobody hunts them with dogs. Both these methods have long since been abandoned as no better than a waste of time. The system of trapping, however, in some districts, has become general, and has undoubtedly done something toward thinning their numbers and checking their advance.

An Australian rabbit trap is an essential part of a rabbit fence. A rabbit-proof fence is intended not only to prevent the animal crossing the line above ground, but also to prevent him getting through by means of burrowing. With this object it goes a few inches below the surface, and experience so far shows that this is sufficient. This, no doubt, arises from the rabbit's want of knowledge of its own powers. Nothing could, of course, be easier than to run a mine below the fence, if only it possessed the required intelligence; but, as a matter of fact, the rabbit burrows only to form habitations, and not to get from one place to another. The army of invasion surges against the barrier; tries to force a passage; tries even to leap over it, and, failing in this, surges back again. The pressure, however, is always greatest at the barrier, and this fact suggested the Australian rabbit trap.

When a fence is made rabbit pits are constructed every three or four hundred yards. The mode of construction is simple. A pit is dug just inside the fence, and is, perhaps, eight feet long by four or even five feet broad. It is usually about six feet deep, and is roughly covered with boards. Entrance to the pit is afforded by an opening left in the fence close to the ground. This opening leads on to a short plank, so hinged that as soon as any weight is put upon it beyond a certain point it tips up, shooting whatever is upon it into the pit below. By this simple means vast quantities of rabbits are trapped day and night.



The result of a rabbit drive in Australia.

rather than to brute force Australia was to owe her deliverance from the rabbit invasion. The results failed to justify these expectations. Rabbits were inoculated; rabbits were undoubtedly infected by the inoculated ones; many rabbits died; but, unfortunately, many also recovered, and these appeared to be thenceforth proof against the disease. The final report of the Commission was unfavorable. Science had so far failed. This practically is the situation today. The rabbit